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ABSTRACT

This report is concerned primarily with impressions gained from a course on the role of school managers which was held for managers of schools in Liverpool's designated Educational Priority Area (EPA). The Liverpool EPA Project is an attempt to create support for the idea of the community school in socially deprived areas. The function of the school manager is to exercise a degree of local control over a school which is centrally administered by a large local authority. The manager acts as a means of communication between residents and the school, and is acquainted with the special needs and problems of his school. An account is given of the discussions during the course on the role and functions of school managers as they themselves see it, and an analysis is presented of those views in the light of the Plowden Report's recommendations on managing bodies within the concept of the community school. (CL)

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The Role of School Managers in Educational Priority Areas

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The major theme underlying the E.P.A. Project in Liverpool is an attempt to create support for the idea of the 'community school'. A great deal of the work already done in the project has been influenced by this ideal i.e. community centred curriculum projects; home – school links; involvement of local industry and business interests in the work of the school. Yet there is one group of lay-people who have been closely connected, for over sixty years, with Primary schools and whose job it is to represent the community, namely The School Managers.

Managing bodies became obligatory in 1902 upon all County authorities, and upon all Local Education Authorities in 1944. The managing body consists usually of seven members plus two co-opted members. It is usual practise to include among the seven a representative from a university and elected representative from the local council – a member of the Education Committee if possible.

The function of managers is to exercise a degree of local control over a school which is centrally administered by a large local authority responsible for many schools. They should be able to act as a means of communication between residents and school and thus obtain a better knowledge of local conditions than the authority. They should also be more acquainted with the special needs and problems of the schools they manage and thus reinforce the head, drawing the attention of the Local Authority to the schools particular difficulties.

In recent years there has been a gradual reduction in the powers of school managers, a process which the Plowden Report would like to see reversed. To quote from the Report 'an active and knowledgeable body of managers can be a great support to a Head Teacher, and a useful interpreter of a school to the community it serves and vice versa'. With the emphasis in the Plowden Report on the concept of the community school, especially in Educational Priority Areas, the Liverpool E.P.A. Project has been especially interested in the role of school managers. A series of meetings on this subject organised by the Granby and Princes Park Community Council early in 1969 led to the decision in October of that year to hold a course on the role of school managers for managers of schools in Liverpool's designated Educational Priority Area. As far as we are aware this was the first such course to be held in the country specifically designed for school managers and it proved an invaluable experience for all those involved.

The initial outcome is this report which is concerned primarily with impressions gained from the course concerning the role and functions of school managers as they themselves saw it and an analysis of those views in the light of the Plowden Report's recommendations on managing bodies within the concept of the community school.

This is not therefore a detailed survey of the legislation and statutes setting down the role of school managers within the educational system. Nor is it an examination of the structure of management committees both in theory and practise in England and Wales. This has already been done in a report prepared by the University of London Institute of Education for the recently published Maud Report on the structure of Local Government in England and Wales. An earlier report by the same team is in this field. This paper, however, is the product of the particular type of research undertaken in E.P.A. Projects, i.e. Action/Research. Here the emphasis is on immediate action during the period of the project, trying out a variety of projects in an endeavour to find the most successful. The research consists of an examination of these projects in terms of the influence they have on those involved and the contribution they make towards the concept of the Community School.

The course for school managers in the Liverpool E.P.A. schools was along these lines and the major objectives of the course were:—

a. To give the managers a clear view of their role in the educational system.

b. To assist them in examining that role in the light of their own experiences.

c. Assist them in adjusting to any new position that might arise from *a*. and *b*.

In the light of what has been said above about the concept of Research/Action it was also hoped by the E.P.A. team engaged in the exercise that this examination of their role by school managers would of itself make some contribution towards changing that role or at least bring it more into line with what managers *should* be doing in the schools rather than what they *think* they are doing.

In order to achieve these ends the course was arranged as follows:—

1. A discussion on the legal and technical powers of school management.
2. An exercise in 'role examination'.
3. A practical session involving participation in a mock school managers meeting.

The first part of the course, on the powers of school managers, was led by Mr. T. McManners, M.A., M.Ed., Chief Inspector for schools for the City of Liverpool. He confined his remarks to County Schools and, as background reading he recommended a booklet published by the Mid-Essex branch of the Association for the Advancement of State Education. *How to be a School Manager or Governor*. Here follows a summary version of his talk prepared by Mr. McManners.

It is misleading to think of School Managers as occupying positions of great authority. A consideration of their 'powers', in the strict sense of the

word, would indeed limit them to a minor role. Whereas their influence for good can be very great, their 'powers' in respect of the quality of the education given in a school and their 'powers' in the financial and other administration of a school, are infinitesimal or non-existent and are always controlled by a higher authority. For this reason many think that the body of Managers is a toothless committee which merely gives some outward show of democracy at work. It is true to say that some Managers gatherings are just this and that laymen are increasingly suspicious of spending their time at fruitless and unnecessary meetings. One might look first of all at the limited 'powers' of Managers and then move on to the much more important work which Managers can do—how they can by their interest and influence, bring greater strength and vitality to the life of the school they serve; for, in fact, SERVICE is the greatest 'power' they possess.

The Instruments and Rules of Management for a school are made by the Council of the City of Liverpool acting as the Local Education Authority. The extent of the 'powers' of Managers is clearly defined in this document. In matters of finance Managers have little effective say. Each year they must submit proposals for the school's special expenditure and the L.E.A. must consider these proposals in preparing the Estimates. Through the L.E.A.'s Advisory officers and Headmaster's reports the L.E.A. are usually aware of the needs of schools and Managers' proposals often emphasise what is already known. As the needs always considerably exceed the resources available, it is well known that not all proposals involving finance can be put in hand. With regard to the school premises the Managers must inspect and report to the L.E.A. on their condition. If they are not satisfied with the state of repair they can only report adversely. They also determine the use to which the school premises may be put out of school hours, but, again, this is subject to any direction of the L.E.A.

The Managers have a part to play in the appointment of Head Teachers and Deputy Head Teachers. Such posts are advertised and the Managers, with a representative from the L.E.A. in attendance, draw up a short-list. The final appointment, however, is made by the appropriate committee of the L.E.A., a representative of the Managers being present at the interviews. In regard to dismissals, the Head and Deputy can be dismissed on the recommendations of the Managers, unless the L.E.A. determine otherwise. Dismissal procedure 'for misconduct or other urgent cause' is again through the Managers but is finally regulated by the appropriate Education Committee and 'duly confirmed' by the Local Education Authority. Managers have greater powers in the appointment of Assistant Teachers: they are the appointing body. They are, of course, limited to appointing within the limits of the establishment of staff as laid down by

the L.E.A. A further limitation is in practice encountered in that in times of teacher shortage there is not great competition for assistant posts. Furthermore, most appointments to the Authority's service in the primary sphere are made by the Advisory staff in the pre-Easter interviews of candidates completing their training at Colleges of Education and University Departments.

In the organisation of the school and its curriculum the Managers have again only a limited role to play. The L.E.A. determines the general educational character of the school. The Head Teacher, in consultation with the L.E.A. and the Managers, is responsible for the general direction of the conduct and the curriculum of the school. The Head controls the internal organisation, discipline and the supervision of teaching and non-teaching staff. He must report the suspension of a pupil to the Managers who must then consult the L.E.A. The Head Teacher and the Director of Education or his representative are entitled to attend all Managers meetings and full consultation is always necessary between the Head and his Chairman and the Director of Education. Teaching staff must be given opportunities to submit their views to the Managers through the Head Teacher. Other points concerning the role of the Managers are to do with School holidays, admission of pupils etc. but in all spheres the limitations of managerial 'powers' are clearly visible. This limitation is more obvious in the County Schools than in the Voluntary sector where powers and responsibilities are greater.

The Manager's role is effective only if approached from the viewpoint of service—service to the community through the school. An active Manager is one who attends all meetings and school functions, who is well-known in the local community and who seeks to involve the school in the local community. He will understand the structure of local educational administration and have some appreciation of the duties of senior officers. He will be aware of the sphere of influence of the Managerial body and of the procedures to be followed. He should seek to have a general awareness of modern educational theory and practice while at the same time understand that the Head Teacher and his staff are the professionals in this field and that responsibility for the teaching is in the hands of the Head.

There is a great and increasing interest in education in the country at large and there are many changes in education. The schools are becoming much more a public concern and many parents and teachers are looking forward to forming stronger links between home, school and community. In such a situation and with the thinking that is being developed on the establishment of 'community schools' many questions are posed. How can school accommodation be used for community purposes? Should schools

be provided with dual use buildings and include generous provision for library, medical and welfare services as well as for social and educational activities? With a vast increase in the usage of facilities during evenings and week-ends what extra teaching and ancillary staff will it be necessary to employ? All these questions and many others have financial implications and Managers will realise that early in any discussion of community schools the extent of the backing which the L.E.A. can give should be ascertained. Perhaps some of the answers will be found in the authority's imaginative efforts to establish a 'community' school at the Harrison Jones school in the central city area. The difficulties which will be encountered here and the financial backing required for this project will give some guide-lines as to the practical possibilities of such development.

These are early days in the 'school home community' discussion but now is the time for Managers to play a more positive role in the school/community life. There are many ways in which they can become involved in school life and it is only through such involvement, encouraged by the Head Teacher, that they can 'build bridges' with the community they service. It is with 'service' rather than 'power' that the managerial function will always be concerned.

In the discussion that followed, most of the school managers present agreed with Mr. McManners' statement that managers were wrong to think in terms of 'power' since they were not professionals. Managers, they argued, should 'represent' the community in the school and act by persuasion and argument. In order to fulfill this role they agreed they needed certain background knowledge. The key word was 'service' and in order to serve the community, some felt managers required training to make them better equipped to represent their peers.

It was pointed out that managers had the power to make their committee more representative of the area they served since they could co-opt two members on to their committee. In fact management committees could elect sub-committees if they so desired and thus broaden their representation even further to take in a wider spectrum of the community at large. This might help to answer the criticism that school management committees were unrepresentative of the community and too often political appointments. Some of those present at the meetings felt that the people in the areas designated E.P.A.'s lacked the necessary background and skills to serve as managers but this was very much a minority viewpoint. Others, especially a University representative, felt that they (the managers) were more independent of political pressures than was commonly believed. But there were those who felt that this political overtone had distinct advantages especially when one of the managers was a member of the Education Committee, or a local councillor. In such cases

communication and the flow of information between the management body and the L.E.A. was said to be much more effective.

However, although the powers of school managers were more limited than appeared at first sight there was one power they did in part possess which was in fact very rarely used, i.e. the letting of school premises after hours. The activities had to be specified to the L.E.A. but this was a formality necessary because of the need to cover the expenses of a caretaker or other personnel. It was pointed out that this power was extremely important in the context of the community school since it opened up all sorts of possibilities for adult activities in the evenings which would widen the school intake, cater for the needs and interests of the people in the area, economise on the use of school premises and equipment, make the school the centre for community effort in areas where there was a lack of any sense of community. In many E.P.A.'s people were cut off from family contacts. The churches no longer had as much influence either morally or socially and the old sense of working class community spirit had somewhat disappeared. In such a situation the schools were the last outpost and the only institution capable of drawing the community together.

While most of the managers agreed with the need to create a community school, they foresaw a number of difficulties. The two most important were:—

a. The question of responsibility.

b. Problems arising out of the desire to meet the expressed needs of the people living in the area.

As far as *a.* was concerned it was pointed out that the managers could only advise, whereas many headteachers would not be eager to accept responsibility for events over which they had little or no control. A number of solutions was offered to this problem. It was suggested that a deputy head could be appointed with special responsibility for evening activities. Teachers could be appointed with a teaching load split between day and evening classes. A community association could be formed from amongst the residents to supervise the building and suggest possible activities.

This latter point tied up with *b.*; what if the activities suggested were at variance with the educational role of the school? For instance, what if the people in the district requested bingo? Here there was marked disagreement amongst those present at the course. Some argued that the school stood for certain values and principles which would be endangered if the school was to accept bingo and other similar activities. Rather than reflecting local community values and standards the school should be concerned with passing on certain values and standards *not* commonly

accepted in the area. Other speakers pointed out that this in itself presupposed a value judgement about the values inherent in the local community and that school standards were often alien to the community it was supposed to serve. Values and standards might be worked *through* the community and in particular through school managers. At the moment most parents were ignorant about the managers in their school and something could be done almost immediately to remedy this particular defect by notifying all the parents about their school managers.

Finally, a plea was made for a sort of school coalition of teachers, parents and managers to work together towards the concept of the community school. Some felt that the management committee should include representatives from the teaching profession as well as parents. It was felt that if the Universities were represented on school boards then surely Colleges of Education, with their connections with the schools involvement in teacher training and educational research, would be an invaluable addition to the present school management system.

The next part of the course on the role of school managers, was led by Mr. T. B. Ward, M.A., Head of Group Management Services at Littlewoods Mail Order Store and a member of the Project Steering Committee. This examination of their role was, for the managers present, a logical extension of the previous part of the course where the talk and discussion on the powers of school managers had emphasised the disparity between what the managers thought they could do and what they really could do under the present system as operated by the Liverpool Local Education Authority.

Mr. Ward, in his opening remarks, spoke of the importance of role analysis in industry where the lack of clarity among, and between, people in different roles lead to a great deal of confusion and subsequent inefficiency. Such an analysis could only come from a detailed examination of their role by the people intimately involved in the work under scrutiny. His task, therefore, was not to tell the managers what their role was, or should be, but rather to act as a discussion leader whilst the managers analysed their function in the educational system.

The first question that managers should ask themselves was what exactly was their role? In seeking such a definition it might be possible to illustrate the disparity between what they—the managers—thought they were doing and what they could, or should be doing. One definition offered was that managers were rubber stamps and whipping boys. Mr. Ward pointed out that if this were true why were the managers looked upon as a body with certain responsibilities, because if they had responsibilities then they must have power? Responsibility must go with control and this hardly fitted in with the notion of rubber stamps and whipping boys.

In the often vigorous debate that followed, the question of power and responsibility was thrashed out by the group and a number of important points emerged. It was agreed that, in fact, managers had limited powers because the major responsibility for the schools lay at the centre with the Local Authority and the Government. Thus school managers worked within a structure where there were certain restraints. In this situation it was felt that, in Liverpool, managers had the power to recommend rather than initiate action. However, this power to recommend action could be hampered by the fact that many managers lacked the knowledge and information to make effective use of it.

If, as Mr. Ward put it, power was a function of knowledge then even in the limited sphere where they operated, many school managers were effectively devoid of any power or influence. In this respect some management bodies were better off than others because:—

a. They were interested enough to make it their business to become well informed on all the matters upon which they were likely to have any influence.

b. They had on their committee a Councillor who had access to advice and information not normally available to other managers without a great deal of effort.

On this point some members of the group felt that managers should have the power to cross-examine the experts, i.e. the L.E.A. officials. It was pointed out, however, that even if this were the case, managers would still require certain background knowledge if they were to make the best use of such powers of cross-examination. The members of the group were of the opinion that the present method of selection mitigated against a situation in which managers possessed the necessary knowledge and information essential to the efficient carrying out of even the limited role they had in the educational system.

The fact that many were selected on a party political basis meant that they were sometimes chosen with little regard for the contribution they could make to the life of the school. Sometimes they lacked knowledge of education and a deep acquaintance with the community the school served. This raised the whole question of responsibility. If their responsibility was politically based then not only could it place them beyond the local community but it coloured their attitude towards the role they had in the schools. Possibly this was the major cause of role confusion amongst school managers. They tried to do the job that could only be done by elected representatives on the Council and thus failed when what they should be doing was something quite different, i.e. representing the local community in the school. If responsibility was seen to lie in this field then the role of school managers would be entirely different, not as confined as it now appeared, but offering new channels for action.

For instance, if the management committee accepted the principle of the community school and saw themselves as having a responsibility to the parents in the area then they could be a powerful force in any discussion on curriculum in the school. The concept of the community school in E.P.A.'s implied a community centred curriculum. If the managers knew the school community and had acquired some knowledge of modern thinking on primary education they could recommend changes in the curriculum, or at least be in the position to question the Head intelligently when such matters were raised in committee.

This view of the role of school managers was criticised on the grounds that it implied a view of democracy that did not operate in Great Britain. Under the existing system the people elected their respresentatives to the local council and they in turn appointed school managers. Thus, indirectly, managers *did* represent the community and its interests. Managers, therefore, were responsible to the community in the shape of the democratically elected local authority.

In reply, it was agreed that this was the case but there was nothing in the existing electoral or educational structure which stood in the way of school managers becoming more representative of the community in the sense of having an increased awareness of the community they indirectly served and of its particular educational problems. If this was essential in an elected representative then it was all the more essential for those, like school managers, who were one remove from the electorate. In many instances managers were chosen with little regard for their interest in, or knowledge of, the local community and its educational problems. As someone put it, the school management committee 'was either a grazing field for old political war horses or a testing ground for young political hopefuls'. There was no inherent reason why more local people should not be appointed as school managers. In fact, as stated earlier, greater use of the existing powers to co-opt members by existing committees would go some way to achieve this end.

In his summing up Mr. Ward said that it was obvious from the preceding discussion that:—

a. Managers did not know what their role was and this, as in similar instances in industry, led to conflict and confusion.

b. They were not doing the job they thought they were doing.

c. The mechanism of selection did not provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out their functions effectively.

If managers accepted that their role lay primarily in representing the community in the school then they had an important function in the concept of the community school which was at the heart of the whole E.P.A. Project. Their role would be one of advising and recommending

but at least they would have a reference group to refer to, which was not the case at the moment. This lack of any clear reference group was, as stated earlier, probably the major cause of role conflict amongst and between school managers.

However, even if their position was clarified and they knew their reference group, managers would still need to be more carefully selected and much better informed on educational matters, if they were to make the most of their role in advising the head and questioning the professionals. Here the need was for some form of voluntary course or training scheme along the lines suggested by Mr. McManners and others.

The final session in the course was a mock school managers' meeting chaired by Mrs. Pat Taylor, J.P., Chairman of the Granby Primary School Board of Managers. This session illustrated one of the main themes to come out of the previous meetings, i.e. that managers were not fully equipped to deal with the professionals. Even though the managers taking part in the exercise were very experienced persons, interested enough in their job to attend the course, nevertheless it soon became obvious that the mock session was partially under the control of the person carrying out the role of headmaster, Mr. W. K. Vaux, headmaster of Paddington Comprehensive School.

He amusingly manipulated the agenda to suit his own particular needs. This was due, in part, to the fact that in real life he *was* an extremely able and experienced headmaster. However, the managers were, in the main, also able and experienced individuals, most of whom were fully involved in the social and political life of the city. This very involvement in so many different aspects of community life left them with little time on their hands and this may be the reason why, although they were experts in procedural matters, they lacked the necessary expertise on educational matters and problems effecting the local school community which were very much at the fingertips of the head master. It may be argued that this is an unfair comment to make about the managers when, after all, it was only a mock meeting dealing with imaginary issues. The point is that the issues were not entirely imaginary. They were the sort of problems that crop up continually in E.P.A. schools and with which both the head and managers attending the course were fully conversant. It was, indeed, fascinating how involved the managers became in the meeting. It became so real-life that for long periods the 'fictional' element seemed completely suspended.

To sum up, it was obvious that some school managers were unsure of their role. The discussion on the powers of school managers made it abundantly clear that many of the powers managers thought they possessed were severely limited, except in regard to the use of the school

premises after school hours. Their role was very much one of recommending, advising and questioning the experts. To fill this role properly many felt they need a certain amount of training in order to gain the necessary expertise. The present method of selection did not take enough account of the necessity for such expertise. Organisations such as the Workers' Educational Association could offer the necessary training courses. With its experience in workers education, the W.E.A. would be particulaly useful as such a providing body, if it was accepted that some effort should be made to broaden the representation on management committees by including parents and/or other adults living in the area.

This was essential if the school was to become a reflection of the real community outside the school walls. One might hope that the school might then become an extension of the cosiest of homes and a projection of the most stimulating aspects of community life, reflecting the society which created it and, in turn, seeing in society its own reflection. The community or neighbourhood school that this envisages requires that the school and its surroundings are fluently, perhaps imperceptibly, linked. The school management board could provide that link.

At present, in some cases and to some extent, there is inadequate communication between school and home and school and community. It would seem that the school managers, with a foothold in both camps, are admirably placed to act as interpreters between school and parents or other members of the community. This might initially mean some change in the constitution of managerial panels. As well as the very necessary council nominations it would be valuable to have teachers and the locality directly represented in some fashion. There is also a strong argument for involving the ten colleges of education attached to Liverpool University—wherein lies a wealth of school experience—in the management of schools.

If managers accepted this role in the life of the community school then many of their present difficulties would disappear. At the moment they are often frustrated because they try to do a job which is really the function of the Education Committee or the L.E.A. when in fact they should be representing the local community. It is here that they could put their powers to recommend, advise and consult to the best possible use by acting as a bridge between school and community. The sort of work they might do in this situation would be—

a. Discuss with parents if and why they lack interest in their children's schooling and attempt to resolve such problems.

b. Familiarise themselves with teachers' difficulties and the intricacies of new approaches. so that they may communicate these to the parents.

c. Introduce parental and communal interests into the school through the

personal hobbies, jobs etc. of people in the locality; through support activities such as collection of materials for art and craft or construction of equipment etc.

d. Use their present powers to let the school premises after school hours to run educational activities particularly geared for adults in the area. Again, as with the proposed training course for managers, the W.E.A. would seem to be the ideal organisation to undertake this work.

e. Introduce school into community through organisation of displays or exhibitions of school activities at social focal points like shops, churches, clubs, old people's groups etc.

f. Involve parents directly in school meetings etc. by assisting with refreshments, or in holiday activities, or in fund raising.

The acceptance of this vitally important function in the structure of the community school is not without its difficulties for school managers. It calls for a great deal of soul searching and self-analysis on their part, particularly as regards the function of the school in the community e.g. is the school concerned solely with the task of passing on accepted values and standards or should it reflect the many standards and values which are a vitally important part of the life of the school community but which often seem to be at variance with much that the school stands for in our society? If school managers can fully grasp the importance of the concept of the community school then the role of managers in the seventies will be one of vital educational significance. The value of the course for school managers, run by the Liverpool E.P.A. Project, lay in the fact that it made some small contribution to that process of self-analysis and thus, it is hoped, towards the realisation of the ideal of the community school.

NB. It should be pointed out that, although the conclusion expressed here is the firm conviction of the Liverpool E.P.A. Project team, the meat of this paper is an account of spirited discussions during a highly significant and interesting course. Obviously, many of the views expressed were personal and minority ones and are not necessarily held by the Project team.

Occasional Papers

The Liverpool Educational Priority Area Project is one of a number of national-mounted action-research attempts to find ways of improving the educational life of socially deprived areas. During the two years remaining to the project, it is intended to publish occasional papers dealing with matters related to the team's work. They will vary greatly from considerations of basic principles involved to accounts of actual action. The intention is, in a small way, to keep the EPA issue in the educational mind's eye and to focus attention on possible means of meeting aspects of the problem.

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